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ABSTRACT

The need for accountability in school psychological services is receiving increased attention. School psychologists are now being asked to demonstrate the effectiveness of their services. Data collection procedures can improve services to clients and systems, enhance the delivery system's psychological services program, validate the need for psychological services in school, and promote system exchange and reform initiatives. This paper provides an overview of school psychology accountability strategies. It discusses the importance and rationale of incorporating accountability strategies into practice, and reviews enumerative, process, and outcome data. Practical data collection strategies are illustrated through examples and case studies. A systematic problem-solving framework is presented that can be used for making data-based educational decisions. The problem-solving framework proposed by Zins (1984) could help school psychologists plan and develop relevant, efficient, and useful accountability procedures. The problem-solving data collection should be used to evaluate performance and plan for future professional development. Accountability data could be used to plan and evaluate school and system programs and to suggest possible areas for training. (Contains 18 references.) (JDM)

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Practical Accountability Strategies for School Psychologists

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Paper presented at the National Association of School Psychologists

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Abstract

The need for accountability in school psychological services has received increased attention. School psychologists must be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their services. Data collection procedures can improve services to clients and systems, enhance the delivery of a system's psychological services program, validate the need for psychological services in schools, and promote system change and reform initiatives.

This paper provides an overview of school psychology accountability strategies. The importance and rationale of incorporating accountability strategies into practice is discussed. Enumerative, process, and outcome data are reviewed. Practical data collection strategies are illustrated through examples and case studies. A systematic problem-solving framework is presented that can be used for making data-based educational decisions.

Rationale

Accountability has been an integral part of educational reform initiatives. The pubic demand for accountability in education has led to increased efforts to demonstrate the effectiveness of school psychological services. School psychologists must be able to provide evidence that their services result in favorable outcomes for clients. In School Psychology: A Blueprint for Training and Practice II (1997), Ysseldyke et al. have designated data-based decision making and accountability as a school psychology leadership and function domain. New assessment and decision making practices have resulted in an increase in accountability practices among practitioners and training programs (Fairchild, 1985). The changes in school psychologists' roles from the traditional special education "test-place" role to data-based problem-solving has also contributed to an increased emphasis in data collection and accountability.

Surveys indicate that approximately 60% of school psychologists collect some type of accountability data (Fairchild & Zins, 1992; Zins & Fairchild 1986). A comparison of 1986 and 1992 accountability data suggested that the percentage of school psychologists involved in accountability efforts has not changed significantly over time. Unfamiliarity with accountability procedures was reported by survey respondents as the most significant barrier to collecting accountability data followed by the amount of time required to collect data. Most respondents (57%) collected data because it was required by their supervisor. Others collected data out of personal choice (52.7%), to plan for

future service delivery (52.7%) or because it was required by their central office (40%) or state department of education (33%).

Zins (1997) discussed the need for accountability in school psychology. One of the main reasons for incorporating accountability into practice is for the benefit of clients and consumers of school psychological services. Consumer satisfaction information can provide valuable information on client/system needs.. Accountability data can be collected to determine consumer satisfaction with services. School psychologists also can collect data on the effectiveness of the services they provide to clients. By assessing outcomes, psychologists can determine the impact of their services and use information to improve the services that they offer to clients.

A second reason for collecting accountability data is to assist practitioners with their professional development. Accountability data can be used to evaluate professional goals and skills. School psychologists can collect information on the types of services they provide to clients and outcomes. With this information, psychologists can make data-based decisions on whether the time they spent involved in various activities is resulting in positive outcomes for students. For example, school psychologists can evaluate the time spent on conducting formal evaluations and determine if they lead to favorable outcomes for clients. If one notices that too much time is being spent on assessment activities that do not result in improved academic performance, psychologists may be able to make the needed changes in the services they provide to better meet the needs of clients.

Accountability practices also can lead to improvement in a system's overall psychological services program. System-wide implementation of accountability practices can provide useful information on the strengths, weakness, and needs of a school system. Accountability data may provide system administrators with information on referral patterns, groups of consumers receiving services, and time spent in classification activities. Patterns in the data may suggest areas in need of change on a systems level. Accountability efforts also offer potential benefits to the overall profession of school psychology. Data can be used to support the need for decreasing student-psychologist ratios, support changes in school psychologists' roles, enhance public relations, and increase the community's awareness of the services that school psychologists can offer.

Definition of Accountability

Several different definitions of accountability have been offered in the psychology and education literature. Lessinger (1970) defined accountability has an "agreement by school staff members to contract on the basis of providing a service answerable to stipulated performance standards" (p. 318). Zins (1984) proposed the following definition of accountability:

> Accountability is an evaluative effort designed to systematically gather information relevant to the performance of school psychologists. It enables them to demonstrate the effectiveness of their services to others and it provides an evaluation of how well they have met their performance objectives. It is concerned with both quantitative and qualitative aspects of practice, and . . . it is

particularly useful in improving service delivery and enhancing professional development (p. 58).

Trachtman (1981) made a distinction between accountability-imposed and accountability-offered. Accountability-imposed refers to documenting to justify services rendered in response to a request from a higher authority. This may happen when a supervisor requires a school psychologist to document hours involved in various activities or the number of evaluations completed. Accountability-offered involves the initiation of accountability procedures out of professional responsibility. School psychologists may initiate data collection to evaluate their effectiveness, improve perceptions of consumers, and enhance service delivery.

Fairchild and Zins (1992) found that majority of school psychologists collect accountability data as a result of a demand from a supervisor (accountability-imposed). Although both types of accountability may lead to improvements in service delivery, there is a greater chance that school psychologists will change their professional behavior when accountability procedures are self-initiated (Zins, 1984). Furthermore, when accountability procedures are imposed by authority figures, school psychologists may have minimal input into how their services are evaluated or the criteria by which their performance is judged. Imposed accountability strategies such as collecting data on the number of evaluations completed provides a limited view of the role of school psychologists and does not provide information that would necessarily support role change. In cases where accountability is imposed, it is critical that school psychologists collect data beyond what is minimally required. School psychologists should gather

additional information that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and support a qualitative and quantitative expansion of psychological services.

Types of Accountability Data

Zins (1995) identified three types of accountability data: enumerative, process, and outcome. Enumerative data refers to information that is gathered by tallying the number of various activities occurred. For example, a school psychologist may tally the number of evaluations completed within a year, the number of students that received direct psychological intervention, or the number of teacher referrals. School psychologists also may record the number of hours spent in various activities and calculate the percentage of time engaged in such activities as consultation, counseling, assessment, and professional development.

Of those school psychologists who collect accountability data, enumerative data is gathered most often. In the survey conducted by Fairchild and Zins (1992), 97% of those school psychologists who reported that they obtain accountability data indicated that they gathered enumerative data. Although the relationship between the type of accountability data collected and the reason for collecting data was not examined by the researchers, it is likely that many of the school psychologists who collect enumerative data do so out of a request from a supervisor. School psychologists are often required to maintain records of the number of evaluations completed and hours spent in various types of activities.

Process data are collected to evaluate the implementation of services or assess how the services are perceived by clients (i.e., consumer satisfaction). This type of data provides information on how things were done or how something was experienced rather

than the outcome of the service. School psychologists also may assess client and system satisfaction with services rendered.

Fairchild and Zins (1992) found that 36% of school psychologists who utilize accountability procedures collect process data. Process data are relatively easy to collect through surveys and interviews. Although there are many limitations to attitudinal measures, process data collection procedures can produce useful and valid information about how clients perceive psychological services and the implementation of those services.

Outcome data describe the changes in client behavior (child, parent, and system) that result from a service. School psychologists collect outcome data to measure goal attainment or changes in targeted behavior due to specific interventions. Although process data often yields the most useful information, few school psychologists collect accountability data. In their survey of school psychologists (1992), Fairchild and Zins found that 26% of those involved in accountability practices collect outcome data. School psychologist may not obtain outcome data due to the inherent difficulty in collecting this type of information.

Accountability Procedures

Procedures for collecting accountability data often involve tallying the hours performed in various activities. The daily log is often used to record time and the types of services performed (Figure 1). Each specific activity is then coded under a general category such as Assessment, Counseling, Professional Development, Supervision, and

FIGURE 1

School Psychologist Daily Log

Name: District:
Week: School:

Activity Codes: A = Assessment, CON = Consultation, C = Counseling, PD = Professional Development, S = Supervision, IT = Inservice Training

Day	Activity	Code	Hours
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Weekly Total			A = CON = C = PD = S = IT =
Cumm. Hours			A = CON = C = PD = S = IT = Total =

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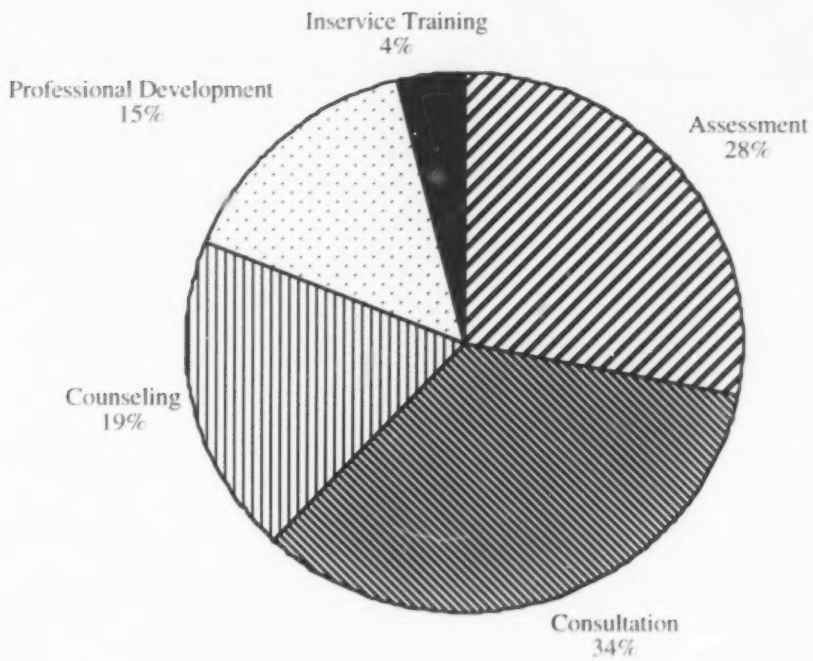
Inservice Training. Classification systems can contain more specific categories such as the activity categories suggested by Fairchild (1975). However, too many categories can be confusing and difficult to interpret. The percentage of time spent in activities can be calculated by dividing the number of hours spent in the activity category by the total number of hours. Monthly, semester, and annual reports can be generated and displayed graphically (Figure 2).

School psychologists also can collect data on the number of teacher referrals, students served, and evaluations conducted. Referrals patterns can be analyzed by differentiating the types of referrals made (behavioral, academic, or combined) and the types of interventions that resulted from the referral (direct intervention, consultation, counseling, parent training, etc.). The amount of time elapsed between the referral and implementation of the intervention also is useful to examine. Immediacy of feedback can be used to justify new personnel and is often valued by consumers and system administrators (Fairchild, 1975). Groups of students served (special education versus general education) can be easily determined and used to identify target groups and underserved populations.

School psychologists have often been evaluated based upon the number of assessments completed. This is a limited view of the functioning of school psychologists. The traditional "test-place" role has been criticized because it does not always lead to effective interventions for students (Reschly, 1988). In fact, school psychologists can demonstrate through enumerative data that spending the majority of their time in

FIGURE 2

Percentage of Time Spent in Various School Psychology Activities



classification activities is not serving the needs of their clients. The number of evaluations completed and time spent in classification activities may be used to justify increasing school psychologist-student ratios and to advocate for the broadening of school psychologists' roles.

Process data can be collected by surveying teachers, parents, and students to assess satisfaction of services rendered. Fairchild (1985) described a consumer feedback

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system that utilizes a series of questionnaires, a record-keeping procedure, and an interview format to elicit information regarding school psychology intern effectiveness. This system can be applied to other school psychology practitioners. Questionnaires are distributed to teachers and parents to evaluate satisfaction with assessment and consultation services. Student questionnaires are completed to evaluate student satisfaction with counseling services. Respondents use a Likert rating scale (1 – 5) to respond to each item. Mean ratings per item are calculated along with the return rates. Strengths, weakness, and recommendations are generated from each of the questionnaires. On-going record keeping allows trainers or supervisors to monitor consumer feedback on a regular basis, identify areas that require further training/experience, and enhance public relations and practitioner visibility.

Surveys also may be used to assess consumer satisfaction with particular programs. Figure 3 is a survey developed to evaluate teacher satisfaction with Kid Talk Teams. Kid Talk Teams are grade-level teams composed of teachers, student services staff (psychologists, counselors, pupil personnel workers), and administrators that use a systematic problem-solving process to develop prereferral interventions (Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996). This survey was designed to measure teacher satisfaction and to evaluate the degree to which teams were following the process. Items such as "problems were defined in concrete and measurable terms" were developed to determine the extent to which the teams followed the systematic problem-solving process.

The implementation of the problem-solving process by Kid Talk Teams also was assessed through systematic observations of the teams. Bartels and Mortenson (1999)

FIGURE 3
Kid Talk Team Process Survey

a. Your position this year:

teacher support staff

b. Kid Talk Team(s) you participated in this year:

grade six grade seven grade eight related arts

Please rate each of the following statements by circling the number

1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE 2 = DISAGREE 3 = SOMETIMES AGREE
4 = AGREE 5 = STRONGLY AGREE

1. I made a significant contribution to the Kid Talk process. 1 2 3 4 5

2. I am invested in the success of the Kid Talk process. 1 2 3 4 5

3. Kid Talk was successful in developing effective interventions for students. 1 2 3 4 5

4. The interventions that the Kid Talk team selected were supported by the members. 1 2 3 4 5

5. The Kid Talk team defined problems in concrete and measurable terms. 1 2 3 4 5

6. The Kid Talk team resolved differences in opinion regarding interventions. 1 2 3 4 5

7. The interventions developed the Kid Talk team were based on the needs of children. 1 2 3 4 5

8. Organizational issues limited the Kid Talk team's ability to do what was in the best interest of the child. 1 2 3 4 5

9. Parent input was used by the Kid Talk Team to develop interventions. 1 2 3 4 5

FIGURE 3 -- CONTINUED

10. The Kid Talk team listened to my concerns.	1 2 3 4 5
11. The Kid Talk team used time efficiently.	1 2 3 4 5
12. Parent input was used by the Kid Talk team to identify problems.	1 2 3 4 5
13. The Kid Talk team had a sufficient amount of time to complete the work.	1 2 3 4 5
14. The Kid Talk team was able to find a meeting time that was convenient for all members.	1 2 3 4 5
15. The Kid Talk team focused on creating a match between the student and the curriculum/classroom environment.	1 2 3 4 5
16. Kid Talk members received sufficient training.	1 2 3 4 5
17. Within our building, there were adequate resources for the implementation of the Kid Talk team's recommendations.	1 2 3 4 5
18. The Kid Talk team had sufficient knowledge to design and implement interventions.	1 2 3 4 5
19. The Kid Talk team used collaborative problem solving to improve student learning.	1 2 3 4 5
20. The Kid Talk team collected and used data to identify goals for students and develop, monitor, and evaluate interventions.	1 2 3 4 5
21. The Kid Talk team focused on variables that teachers could control or change.	1 2 3 4 5

developed a Process Observation Form to assess Kid Talk Teams' use of systematic problem-solving (Figure 4). Survey and observational data were summarized and shared with a school improvement team to identify program strengths and weakness, establish goals for the project, and determine training needs for team members.

The effectiveness of interventions is often collected through the use of single-subject designs. Due to ethical concerns regarding the removal of needed interventions, advanced single-subject designs such as A-B-A and A-B-A-B are not recommended. These designs often involve removing the intervention for a period of time to determine if the change in behavior can be attributed to the intervention or other factors such as maturation.

Simple single-subject designs typically involve several measurements of the targeted behavior before the intervention is implemented (baseline). Following intervention implementation, the occurrence of the target behavior is regularly measured. When significant increases in the targeted behavior across conditions are observed and other factors remain constant, changes in the targeted behavior are attributed to the success of the intervention.

Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS) is an outcome-based procedure that assesses student performance toward observable and quantitatively defined goals. Mather and Barbrack (1984) developed a method of measuring counseling goals using GAS. Goals are mutually determined and ranked according to priority by the counselor and student. Each goal is broken down into specific observable and quantifiable behaviors and is assigned weights (+2, +1, 0, -1, -2) that represent long-term, intermediate, and short-term

FIGURE 4

Process Observation Form

Date _____ Student's first name _____ School _____

Grade _____ Observer _____ Psychologist _____

Referral Concern - ☐ Behavior ☐ Academic ☐ Combined Case # _____

☐ 1. Meeting is facilitated by SST representative
- o Psychologist was present

☐ 2. Minutes are taken on appropriate form

☐ 3. Problem-solving conducted only on students listed as "*initial referrals*"
- o non-agenda students were discussed

☐ 4. Referral concern described in observable and measurable terms

☐ 5. Instructional issues are addressed

☐ 6. Baseline data is presented or plan to collect baseline data is developed
- o CBA: Accuracy and fluency
- o Percent work completed
- o Test scores: Standardized and classroom-based
- o Systematic classroom observation

☐ 7. Antecedents (e.g., setting, task, time of day) and consequences are discussed

☐ 8. An observable and measurable goal has been set

☐ 9. Teacher(s) are actively involved in planning the intervention

☐ 10. Specifics of intervention are outlined

☐ 11. *Who* will implement the plan is specified

☐ 12. *What* will be implemented is specified

☐ 13. *When* the intervention will be implemented is specified

☐ 14. Facilitator/other team member ascertains that all team members are in agreement regarding *who* will implement *what* by *when*

☐ 15. Follow-up date is set for next Kid talk meeting

Total Percent completed steps: _____

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goals. During the counseling sessions, the counselor provides feedback to the client regarding performance. Figure 5 is an example of a Goal Attainment Scale form.

It is important to consider how outcome data will be collected before the intervention is implemented. An evaluation plan should be developed to assess student response to interventions. Often, outcome data can be incorporated as part of the intervention. Figure 6 is an example of an intervention developed to increase student on-task behavior. The teacher and student indicate on the chart the percentage of each task completed. Data from the charts can be collected and analyzed to determine the student's response to the intervention by comparing the student's current performance with baseline data. Students and teachers also receive feedback on whether the student has reached the goal at the end of each task, class, and day.

One of the most efficient and effective methods of collecting outcome data on student response to academic interventions is through the use of curriculum-based measurement (CBM) procedures (Shinn, 1989). CBM procedures are quick and easy to administer. Studies have found that CBM procedures are valid, reliable, and culturally fair measures of academic achievement (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1992; Marston, 1989; Shinn, Good, Knutson, Tilly, & Collins, 1992). CBM procedures are relatively sensitive to academic improvement over time and can be used to monitor academic interventions (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Hamlett, 1989). Students can set their own goals using baseline data and chart their progress over time.

FIGURE 5

Instructional Consultation Student Documentation Form

Student's Name _____ Grade ____ Date of Birth _____ Date Started _____

Teacher's Name _____ Case Manager _____ School _____

Goal Attainment Scale (GAS)

Step 1: Initial description of concern				
Step 2: Prioritize	**Importance 1 2 3 4** (student at instructional level? Y N)	**Importance 1 2 3 4** (student at instructional level? Y N)	**Importance 1 2 3 4** (student at instructional level? Y N)	**Importance 1 2 3 4** (student at instructional level? Y N)
Step 3: Observable/measurable statement of current performance (following baseline)	Date collected _____	Date collected _____	Date collected _____	Date collected _____
Step 4: Short-term goal: Expected performance in ___ weeks (4-6 weeks)	Date consistently attained _____	Date consistently attained _____	Date consistently attained _____	Date consistently attained _____
Step 5: Interim goal: Expected behavior in ___ weeks	Date consistently attained _____	Date consistently attained _____	Date consistently attained _____	Date consistently attained _____
Step 6: Long-term goal: Expected behavior in ___ weeks	Date consistently attained _____	Date consistently attained _____	Date consistently attained _____	Date consistently attained _____

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FIGURE 6

APPROACH TO TASK CHART

DATE_____ SUBJECT_____ TASK_____

	BEFORE			AFTER	
WHAT TO DO	STUDENT: Think about ?	TEACHER: Check √		STUDENT: Check √	TEACHER: Check √
MATERIALS	What materials do I need?	Identified materials Yes __ No __		Did I use materials correctly? Yes __ No __	Used materials correctly Yes __ No __
DIRECTIONS	How do I complete the task?	Explained directions Yes __ No __		Did I follow directions? Yes __ No __	Followed directions Yes __ No __
TIME	What are the time limits?	Identified time limits Yes __ No __		Did I complete 75% of the assignment? Yes __ No __	Percentage of assignment completed _____%

A Problem-Solving Framework for Accountability Procedures

Zins (1984) developed a behavioral problem-solving framework to be used with accountability procedures. It is based on a scientific method of defining problems, operationalizing information, and evaluating results. The first step in the model involves problem identification and formulation. The school psychologist must first determine who needs or wants the accountability data and the purpose of collecting the information. Job descriptions and discussions with administrators can help prioritize and target areas where data will be collected. School psychologists must begin with identifying areas for improvement and skill development.

After specific areas have been targeted, the next step is to determine possible sources of information and various ways of gathering the data. Sources of information may include teachers, parents, students, and supervisors. A multisource and multimethod approach is recommended to increase the validity and reliability of the results.

The next step in the process is to determine the most appropriate data collection instruments. These procedures have been described in previous sections of this paper. It is important to consider such factors as time, ease of administration, and availability of data. Enumerative, process, and outcome data collection procedures can be used depending upon the questions being asked.

Once the plan has been developed, data is then collected, interpreted, and analyzed. It is important to periodically analyze and review data. Progress toward goals can be evaluated periodically rather than waiting until the end of the year. As patterns emerge, needed changes in service delivery can be made.

Accountability data is then disseminated to consumers and supervisors. Information must be shared with major stakeholders to provide evidence of the effectiveness of services. Zins (1984) suggested the construction of an "accountability report" that summarizes the data. Technology can be used to present the data graphically so it is easy to interpret.

After data have been shared, it is important that school psychologists reflect on the accountability process. To what extent did the procedures used provide useful information? Did the accountability data lead to improved performance? Did the strategies used provide reliable and valid data? What are the implications for professional development/further training?

Guidelines for Developing Accountability Procedures

The problem-solving framework proposed by Zins (1984) can help school psychologists plan and develop relevant, efficient, and useful accountability procedures. Data collected should be related to areas previously targeted for professional development. Accountability procedures should be part of a larger professional development plan. Collecting data without a purpose is a frivolous practice. School psychologists need to consider their professional strengths and weaknesses, identify areas for further development, create activities to enhance skill development, and collect accountability data to measure progress toward goals.

Data collection techniques also need to be fairly easy to implement. Elaborate research designs are often not practical for the school setting. Surveys should be relatively short and focused on specific targeted areas. Outcome data should be easy to

collect and incorporated into the intervention plan if possible (e.g., self-monitoring forms, behavior checksheets, homework assignment books).

Finally, data collected should be used to evaluate performance and plan for future professional development. Data should be shared with consumers of psychological services, supervisors, and other stakeholders. Accountability data can be used to plan and evaluate school and system programs and suggest possible areas for training.

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